

On the Relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Vocabulary Learning among Iranian Pre-university EFL Learners

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ABSTRACT: This study aimed at examining the relationship between Emotional Intelligence (EI) and learning English language vocabulary. The male (N= 119) and female (N= 98) participants who were randomly selected from high schools in Zanjan Province were asked to complete a Persian version of an emotional intelligence (EI) questionnaire and answer a vocabulary achievement test. The EI questionnaire consisted of 90 items that examined fifteen components of EI. The vocabulary test battery contained 40 items in various test formats that was developed on the basis of an official high school textbook. The results of the study showed a low and negative correlation between the students' emotional intelligence and vocabulary knowledge. This finding, which is not consistent with earlier studies, implies that the contribution of EI to vocabulary learning is controversial. The results also showed that male and female students are significantly different from each other in performing on some components of EI. This indicates that the emotional capacity of male and female students has been developed differently. Moreover, these emotional capacities can be employed in a different way in the processes of language learning in general and vocabulary learning in particular.

Keywords: emotional intelligence (EI), vocabulary knowledge, and Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-I)

Recently, there has been increasing interest in examining factors that seem to affect vocabulary learning such as motivation, attitude, personality types, and intelligence. The inception of Multiple Intelligence Theory (Gardner, 1983) motivated a number studies in second language acquisition research (Armstrong, 1995, Chen & Gardner, 2005; McMahon & Rose, 2004). The emergence of Emotional Intelligence (Goleman, 1995) also motivated researchers to realize its role in the development of language abilities. The present study aims at investigating the role of emotional intelligence on learners' vocabulary knowledge in an EFL setting.

Literature Review

It is believed that the emotional intelligence evolved along with mankind. In order to survive in early hunter-gatherer societies, people had to cope, to adapt and to get along with others. The roots of emotional intelligence, however, can be traced back to the concept of "social intelligence". The proximal roots of emotional intelligence lie in the work of Gardner (1983). It appears that, as Danciu (2010) suggests, Payne introduced the concept of emotional intelligence for the first time. He believes that emotional intelligence is an ability that involves a creative relationship with fear, pain and desire.

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Goleman (1995) defined emotional intelligence as " the abilities such as being able to motivate oneself and persist in the face of frustration, to control impulses and delay gratification; to regulate one's moods and keep distress from swamping the ability to think; to emphasize and to hope" (p.34). Goleman (1998) identified five domains of emotional intelligence:

1. Self awareness: Knowing one's internal states, preferences, resources, and intuitions.
2. Self regulation: Managing one's internal states, impulses, and resources.
3. Motivation: Emotional tendencies that guide or facilitate reaching goals.
4. Empathy: Awareness of other's feelings, needs, and concerns.
5. Social skills: The ability to inspire and influence emotion in others and interacting with them.

Goleman (2001) proposed a refinement of his previous (1998) model by including four clusters of general emotional intelligence abilities: self awareness, self management, social awareness and relationship management. This model includes twenty competencies which nest in its four clusters.

Mayer and Salovey (1997, p.10) believe that emotional intelligence is the ability to perceive accurately, appraise, and express emotion; the ability to access and generate feelings when they facilitate thought; the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge; and the ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth. Mayer and Salovey (1997) proposed a revised model of emotional intelligence and made a distinction between four components of emotional intelligence, i.e., perception, appraisal, and expression of emotion; emotional facilitation of thinking; understanding, analyzing, and employing emotional knowledge; and, finally, reflective regulation of emotions in order to promote further emotional and intellectual growth.

Bar-on (cited in Pishghadam, 2009, p. 33) characterizes emotional intelligence as "an array of non cognitive capabilities, competencies, and skills that influence one's ability to succeed in coping with environmental demands and pressures." His model of emotional intelligence consists of five broad areas of skills: intrapersonal, interpersonal, adaptability, stress management, and general mood. Bar-on (2005) believes that emotionally intelligent people are more aware of what other people want; therefore, they are able to establish cooperative relationship with others.

All emotional intelligence models share a common core of basic concepts. In essence, emotional intelligence is the ability of recognizing and regulating of emotions in ourselves and in others. On the basis of this definition, the domains of self awareness and self management fall within intrapersonal intelligence and social awareness and relationship management fall within interpersonal intelligence. It appears that learning a language and learning vocabulary in particular can be considered as a self-management study. Thus, an examination of the relationship between EI and vocabulary knowledge in a foreign language learning context can shed lights on these issues.

The other variable of this study is vocabulary knowledge of the participants. Vocabulary knowledge can be regarded as a crucial dimension of language learning and acquisition as it can show the progression of language development in language use. Moreover, vocabulary knowledge is present in almost all types of language learners' communication. As Richards and Renandya (2002) suggest, without extensive vocabulary knowledge learners achieve less than their potential. This is possibly the reason for the increasing interest among the researchers in examining the nature and the role of vocabulary in language learning and acquisition.

It is generally argued that there is no consensus about the nature of lexical knowledge (Laufer & Paribakht, 1998). Richards (1976) proposed a model of vocabulary knowledge that included such components as frequency, syntax, derivation, association, semantic features, and polysemy. According to Qian (1998), vocabulary knowledge can be divided into two dimensions, i. e., breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge. He defines the breadth of vocabulary knowledge as "vocabulary size, or the number of words for which a learner has at least some minimum knowledge of meaning" and depth or quality of vocabulary knowledge as "one's level of understanding of various important aspects of a word" (Qian 1998, p.13). Main aspects of the depth of knowledge of a word, according to Qian, are pronunciation and spelling, morphological properties, syntactic properties, meaning, register or discourse features, and frequency of a word in the language. Earlier definitions of vocabulary knowledge were not specific enough. Henriksen (1999) proposed three separate but related vocabulary

dimensions: a partial-precise knowledge dimension, a depth of knowledge dimension, and a receptive-productive dimension.

Petrides, Frederickson, and Furnham (2004) tried to examine the role of trait emotional intelligence in academic performance and deviant behavior at school. Participants were 650 pupils in British secondary education. The participants were asked to complete the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (TEIQ), Eysenk Personality Questionnaire (EPQ), and Verbal Reasoning Test (VRT). The scores from Key Stage 3 (KS3) assessment and General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) were also collected. Information about authorized absences, unauthorized absences, and exclusions were also gathered. The findings of the research showed that trait emotional intelligence moderated the relationship between cognitive ability and academic performance. Moreover, students with high trait emotional intelligence scores had less unauthorized absences. They were also less likely to have been expelled from school.

In another study, Pishghadam (2007) tried to determine the influence of emotional and verbal intelligences on second language learning. He conducted a study with 576 EFL students. The findings showed that listening, reading, speaking, writing, and GPA strongly correlated with two dimensions of emotional intelligence, i.e., stress management and intrapersonal competencies.

The role of EI on the performance of male and female high school students is not documented in the literature. Therefore, an examination of the relationship between language learners' emotional intelligence and their vocabulary knowledge appears to be necessary. To address this issue the following two research questions are formulated:

1. Is there any relationship between Iranian high school language learners' emotional intelligence and their performance on various vocabulary test formats?
2. Is there any statistically significant difference between Iranian high school males' and females' emotional intelligence?

Method

Participants

Pre-university high school students of Zanjan Province were invited to participate in this study. A total number of 217 students, including 119 females and 98 males were randomly selected. Most of the participants were at the age of 17 or 18 but a few of the students were at the age of 19 or 20. The reason for choosing pre-university level was the homogeneity of the students, since they all had passed the nationwide final exam of English course at grade-three of high school.

Instruments and Procedure

In order to measure the participants' emotional intelligence, a Persian version of Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-I) was used. The EQ-I is a self-report scale which includes 90 items and uses a five-point Likert scale for rating the respondents' responses. The questionnaire measures five competencies and fifteen components. The five competencies are intra-personal, inter-personal, adaptability, stress management and general mood. The fifteen components which are measured by the questionnaire are emotional self-awareness, assertiveness, self-regard, self-actualization, independence, empathy, inter-personal interrelationship, social responsibility, problem solving, reality testing, flexibility, stress tolerance, impulse control, happiness, and optimism. The reliability coefficient of emotional intelligence questionnaire used in this study is 0.92. This shows that the participants' responses to the emotional intelligence questionnaire are highly consistent.

In order to measure the vocabulary knowledge of the learners, a vocabulary achievement test was developed. The constructed vocabulary test included 40 items measuring the vocabulary knowledge of the students. Different types of item format including multiple choice, odd word, matching, and fill in the blanks were used to prepare the test. The reliability coefficient of the vocabulary knowledge test used in this study was 0.77 which indicates that the participants' responses to the vocabulary items are consistent enough and can be used for further analysis. When the test was constructed, the participants were asked to take the test. Each correct response was scored (1) and the wrong responses were scored (0). The participants were also asked to complete the emotional intelligence questionnaire.

Data Analysis

The researchers performed a Chi-square analysis to analyze the data and answer the research questions. The participants' scores on fifteen components of emotional intelligence were compared with their scores on different types of vocabulary items. In order to find a relationship between different components of emotional intelligence and the different types of vocabulary items, a correlation analysis was employed. To find any difference between males' and females' emotional intelligence, an independent t-test was used. And finally, a two-way ANOVA was conducted to find the difference in the performances of participants on various test formats and their emotional intelligence.

Results

To address the first research question, a correlation analysis was performed. The results, as displayed in Table 1, show that there is a low correlation between the components of emotional intelligence and vocabulary test formats. Moreover, the table also reveals a low and negative correlation between the total scores of emotional intelligence and vocabulary test.

Table 1. Correlation Coefficient of Learners' EI and Vocabulary Knowledge

		Multiple Choices	Odd Word	Matching	Word Relationship	Vocabulary in Context	1 Gap Filling
Problem Solving	Pearson Correlation	-0.01	-0.00	-0.00	0.05	0.07	-0.04
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.81	0.97	0.96	0.40	0.27	0.56
Happiness	Pearson Correlation	-0.08	-0.01	0.01	-0.02	-0.14	-0.12
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.23	0.78	0.88	0.73	0.03	0.07
Independence	Pearson Correlation	-0.06	0.02	-0.09	-0.01	-0.08	-0.09
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.37	0.68	0.16	0.78	0.23	0.14
Stress Tolerance	Pearson Correlation	0.05	0.05	0.00	0.03	-0.04	-0.14
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.45	0.39	0.99	0.64	.051	0.02
Self Actualization	Pearson Correlation	-0.04	0.05	0.07	0.11	-0.00	0.02
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.52	0.45	0.27	0.08	0.97	0.72
Emotional Self-Awareness	Pearson Correlation	0.02	-0.00	0.07	-0.01	-.002	-0.07
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.71	0.93	0.30	0.88	0.68	0.26
Reality Testing	Pearson Correlation	-0.02	-0.03	-0.00	0.02	-0.06	-0.09
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.71	0.61	0.98	0.77	0.34	0.18
Interpersonal Relationship	Pearson Correlation	0.05	0.08	0.09	-0.03	-0.05	-0.18
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.41	0.20	0.17	0.58	0.42	0.00
Optimism	Pearson Correlation	-0.01	0.08	-0.03	0.11	0.01	-0.06
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.84	0.24	0.61	0.09	0.78	0.36
Self Regard	Pearson Correlation	0.05	0.05	-0.01	0.13	0.04	0.00
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.38	0.40	0.78	0.04	0.52	0.90
Impulse Control	Pearson Correlation	-0.09	-0.13	-.004	-0.06	-0.16	-0.08
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.18	0.05	0.51	0.34	0.01	0.22
Flexibility	Pearson Correlation	0.00	0.025	-0.08	0.05	-0.01	-0.01
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.99	0.71	0.21	0.38	0.82	0.88
Social Responsibility	Pearson Correlation	-0.06	-0.06	0.04	-0.0	0.04	-0.09
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.34	0.35	0.56	0.79	0.51	0.17
Empathy	Pearson Correlation	0.11	0.08	-0.05	-0.00	-0.03	-0.04
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.10	0.22	0.46	0.96	0.64	0.52
Assertiveness	Pearson Correlation	0.05	0.05	0.04	0.05	-0.04	-.017
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.45	0.41	0.54	0.42	0.54	0.01

An independent samples t-test was performed to examine the difference between males' and females' emotional intelligence. The results reported in Table 2 indicate that there is a significant difference in problem solving, independence, self-actualization, optimism, and self-regard components of emotional intelligence. This indicates that the emotional capacity of male and female students has been developed differently, and they have their own strengths and weaknesses when it comes to emotional intelligence.

Table 2. Comparing the EI Components of Male and Female High School Students

	Sex of Participants	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Problem Solving	Female	119	72.54	11.57	-2.47	215	0.01
	Male	98	76.32	10.68			
Happiness	Female	119	79.43	15.15	-0.88	215	0.37
	Male	98	81.22	14.37			
Independence	Female	119	58.09	15.27	-1.97	215	0.05
	Male	98	62.00	13.56			
Stress Tolerance	Female	119	70.67	13.18	-1.35	215	0.17
	Male	98	73.09	12.94			
Self Actualization	Female	119	74.56	12.82	-2.54	215	0.01
	Male	98	78.77	11.16			
Emotional Self-Awareness	Female	119	68.43	13.14	-1.26	215	0.20
	Male	98	70.68	12.98			
Reality Testing	Female	119	61.87	12.85	-1.18	215	0.23
	Male	98	63.91	12.20			
Interpersonal Relationship	Female	119	78.48	13.34	-0.20	215	0.83
	Male	98	78.87	14.22			
Optimism	Female	119	70.89	11.97	-2.75	215	0.00
	Male	98	75.47	12.48			
Self Regard	Female	119	74.31	13.51	-2.28	215	0.02
	Male	98	78.74	14.95			
Impulse Control	Female	119	58.45	18.42	-0.35	215	0.72
	Male	98	59.31	17.46			
Flexibility	Female	119	60.95	11.13	-0.87	215	0.38
	Male	98	62.27	11.12			
Social Responsibility	Female	119	87.84	9.38	-0.14	215	0.88
	Male	98	88.02	9.21			
Empathy	Female	119	83.08	9.64	1.20	215	0.22
	Male	98	81.42	10.46			
Assertiveness	Female	119	63.27	13.72	-0.38	215	0.70
	Male	98	63.97	13.28			

In order to examine male and female students' performance on the fifteen components of emotional intelligence, a Two-way ANOVA was performed. The results, as displayed in Table 3, show that there is a significant difference in the performance of participants on emotional intelligence components ($F_{(14, 3225)} = 99.37, P = 0.00$). Males and females also have a significantly different performance on these components ($F_{(1, 3225)} = 20.45, P = 0.00$); However, the interaction between the performances on emotional components and gender is not significant ($F_{(14, 3225)} = 1.06, P = 0.39$). The Eta squared shows that the significant difference in the performances of emotional intelligence can be moderately generalized (Eta = 0.30), while those of gender and the interaction between emotional intelligence and gender are so small that cannot be generalized.

Table 3. Comparing Participants' Performance on EI Questionnaire Based on Gender

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	246515.81	29	8500.54	49.82	0.00	0.30
Intercept	1.66	1	1.66	9.77	0.00	0.96
Components of EI	237362.94	14	16954.49	99.37	0.00	0.30
Gender	3489.53	1	3489.53	20.45	0.00	0.00
Components of EI * Gender	2531.49	14	180.82	1.06	0.39	0.00
Error	550221.47	3225	170.61			
Total	1.75	3255				
Corrected Total	796737.29	3254				

To examine males and females' performances on vocabulary test formats, a Two-way ANOVA was performed. The results, as displayed in Table 4, show that there is a significant difference in the performances of participants on vocabulary test formats ($F_{(5, 1290)} = 95.66$, $P = 0.00$). Males and females did not have significant differences on vocabulary test formats ($F_{(1, 1290)} = 2.24$, $P = 0.13$). The interaction between males and females' performance and vocabulary test formats is not significant ($F_{(5, 1290)} = 1.67$, $P = 0.13$). The Eta squared shows that the significant difference in the performance of vocabulary test formats can be generalized (Eta = 0.27), while those of gender and the interaction between vocabulary test formats and gender are so small that cannot be generalized.

Table 4. Comparing Participants' Performance on Vocabulary Test Based on Gender

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	251621.90	11	22874.71	44.94	0.00	0.27
Intercept	4162906.61	1	4162906.61	8.17	0.00	0.86
Vocabulary test Formats	243445.67	5	48689.13	95.66	0.00	0.27
Gender	1141.59	1	1141.59	2.24	0.13	0.00
Vocabulary test Formats * Gender	4258.95	5	851.79	1.67	0.13	0.00
Error	656553.49	1290	508.95			
Total	5096979.16	1302				
Corrected Total	908175.40	1301				

To show the difference in the performance of male and female students on emotional intelligence questionnaire and vocabulary test, a Two-way ANOVA was performed. The results, as displayed in Table 5, show that there is a significant difference in the performance of participants on emotional intelligence questionnaire and vocabulary test formats ($F_{(20, 4515)} = 129.19$, $P = 0.00$). The Eta squared is high enough that the results can be safely generalized (Eta = 0.36). Males and females have also significant difference in the emotional intelligence and vocabulary test as a whole ($F_{(1, 4515)} = 17.29$, $P = 0.00$). The interaction between gender and participants' scores on emotional intelligence and vocabulary test is not significant ($F_{(20, 4515)} = 1.27$, $P = 0.18$).

Table 5. Comparing Participants' Performance on Vocabulary Test and EI

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	709679.68	41	17309.26	64.76	0.00	0.37
Intercept	2.06	1	2.06	7.71	0.00	0.94
Components of EI	690637.08	20	34531.85	129.19	0.00	0.36
Gender	4622.01	1	4622.01	17.29	0.00	0.00
Components of EI * Gender	6799.56	20	339.97	1.27	0.18	0.00
Error	1206774.97	4515	267.28			
Total	2.26	4557				
Corrected Total	1916454.65	4556				

Discussion

This study aimed at examining the relationship between emotional intelligence and vocabulary knowledge. The results of correlation analysis showed a low and negative correlation between these two variables. Therefore, the first null hypothesis was rejected. The results of the current study did not support the view that emotional intelligence has significant role in academic success of the students. Therefore, the results did not corroborate with those of Song, Haung, Peng, Law, Wong, and Chen (2010) who reported that emotional intelligence and general mental ability can predict the academic performance of the students. Fahim and Pishghadam (2007) found that academic achievement was strongly correlated with several dimensions of emotional intelligence, i.e., intrapersonal, stress management, and general mood competencies. Furthermore, Petrides, Furnham and Fredrickson (2004) found that trait emotional intelligence moderated the relationship between cognitive ability and academic performance. The results of the present study, however, are compatible with the results of some other studies. Woitaszewski and Aalsma (2004) indicated that the social and academic success of the gifted adolescents were independent of their overall emotional intelligence. Bastian, Burns, and Nettelbeck (2005) found a low correlation between emotional intelligence and academic achievement of the students.

This study also aimed at examining male and female students' emotional intelligence. The results of an independent samples t-test revealed a significant difference in problem solving, independence, self-actualization, optimism, and self-regard components of emotional intelligence between males and females. This suggests that women and men have their own strengths and weaknesses when it comes to different components of emotional intelligence. Based on the results of this study, we can suggest that men are more independent and optimistic than women. Men are able to solve problems better, and they are able to realize their own potential capacities. Thus, the second null hypothesis is also rejected. The findings of the present study did not confirm those of Brackett, Mayer, and Warner (2004) who reported that women scored higher than men especially in their ability to perceive emotions and use them to facilitate decision making ability.

Pedagogical Implications

Emotional intelligence, as Boyatzis (2000) suggests, is not fixed, but it is modifiable and can be developed. On the basis of this fact, some implications can be suggested for policy makers, parents, language teachers, and materials developers. As Bar-On (2007) mentioned, there is a need to develop educational programs based on the scientific observations and empirical findings to improve emotionally and socially intelligent behavior among students. Using emotional intelligence in educational system culminates in a more effective, productive, and humane society (Bar-On, 2007). Both parents and English language teachers are expected to be familiar with the concept of emotional intelligence. They are expected to talk about emotions with children, treat children with respect, give children supportive scaffolding, and help them acquire further skills in this respect (Saarni, 2007).

Conclusion

Many researchers such as Laufer (1998), Henriksen (1999), Hulstijn and Laufer (2001), Cameron (2002), Nation (2002), Qian (2002), Nassaji (2006), Alderson (2007), and Zhang and Annual (2008) have emphasized the role of vocabulary knowledge as a significant component of language proficiency. The findings of the present study indicated a low and negative correlation between emotional intelligence and vocabulary knowledge. Moreover the results showed that there is a significant difference in problem solving, independence, self-actualization, optimism, and self-regard components of emotional intelligence between males and females. To conclude, this study recommends that language teachers should be familiar with the concept of emotional intelligence and its impact on the learners' language learning ability.

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